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Bonsall, Charles

Letter to
Robert G. Ingersoll
Salem, Ohio
[1897?]

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LETTER TO ROBERT G. INGERSOLL,

FROM THE PEN OF

HON. CHARLES BONSAI,
SALEM, OHIO.

HE CRITICISES HIM FOR THE WRITING OF A CAMPAIGN DOCUMENT
AND SUGGESTS THAT HE WRITE A BOOK ON
"THE MISTAKES OF INGERSOLL."

Salem, Ohio, December, 1896.
Colonel Robert G. Ingersoll, New York
City:

Sir—Having been a reader and admirer of your lectures on reform topics, for more than a quarter of a century, especially those in denunciation of the stealthy and criminal act of 1873 demonetizing silver, I was naturally very curious to know upon what grounds you could justify yourself in taking the stump against Mr. Bryan, and in favor of McKinley and the single gold standard during the recent political contest. Accordingly, I procured a copy of your speech which Mark Hanna's committee put out as a campaign document. On the first page is printed your name and plume, and the words "Inspired to Loyalty!" "The Financial Issue Treated in a Masterly Manner!"

The said speech contains, on the one hand, more falsehoods and absurdities, and on the other, more truths absolutely inapplicable to the issue and against the party you were trying to defend, than any I read during the campaign.

You undertake to justify your sudden and remarkable change of heart and thought, by declaring that the debts which existed in 1876, when you denounced silver demonetization as robbery, "have all either been paid or outlawed."

The statement is false; but suppose it were true. How are you going to get over your more recent denunciations of the crime of 1873—even as late as 1893? Have all the debts that existed then, "been either paid or outlawed?"

You declare that "Nature, and not law, creates money," and that "the man who says that law makes money, is absolutely incapable of reasoning on any question." Indeed! Can you produce a single "dollar" or piece of money that is not such by the fiat of law? What is the supreme test? Legal tender and that alone. If I sue you for a debt of \$10 and get a judgment in the court, and you offer me a \$10 bank note, ten trade "dollars," ten pieces of gold, each 25 8-10 grains weight, without Uncle Sam's stamp, or ten pieces of any other concrete substance, though each one contains a dollar's worth of material, the court says I may refuse them, because they are not money. But if you tender me a \$10 greenback or ten standard silver dollars, the court says I must accept either, because **EITHER IS MONEY; BEING LEGAL TENDER.**

The Supreme Court of the United States, in the test case as to the constitutionality of the greenback as absolute money—Knox vs. Lee et al.—rendered by Justice Strong, among other things, declared that "the gold or silver thing we call a 'dollar,' is in no sense a standard of a dollar; it is a representative of it." "Value is an ideal thing."

You said that one of the issues of the campaign was "whether there is an appeal from the Supreme Court to a mob." By which I understand you to mean that the protest of Mr. Bryan and his supporters against the decision of the Supreme Court on the Income Tax law, was the protest of a "mob," and yet you fly squarely in the face of the Supreme Court decisions on the great, fundamental question of constitutional money; and if there is anything in the "parity" of your reasoning, you confess to have joined a "mob" yourself. Were William Lloyd Garrison, Stephen Foster, Wendell Phillips, Parker Pillsbury, Owen Lovejoy and

R. G. Ingersoll a "mob," because they affirmed the injustice of the Dred Scott Decision?

But let me quote from a few other men who differ from you on the money question:

Aristotle said that "Money is such, not by nature, but by law."

Plato said, "The best money for any nation is that which has the least value in any other nation." If you have read the writings of Hon. Henry C. Carey on this subject, you can but know that, in analyzing Plato's aphorism, he showed conclusively that a domestic, non-exportable, legal tender, government paper system of money was the most stable, soundest and best for the mass of the people, that we ever had. Crippled as it was by the exception clause at the dictation of the gold gamblers of Wall street, it gave us the best times we ever had, and during its undisputed sway, we had no "panics" or "cramps." These abnormal products made their appearance only after the government started on its journey to what you "goldbugs" are pleased to call "honest money."

In addition to the great men quoted as being diametrically opposed to your absurd theory that "Nature alone makes money," I might mention such "incapable thinkers" as Ricardo, Buckle, Mill, Franklin, Jefferson, Cernuschi, Blaine, Wendell Phillips, and in the line of publications, the Britannica, Appleton and Chambers' Encyclopaedias. Such are a few of the characters of history whom R. G. Ingersoll, during a political campaign of hate, corruption and slander on the part of the gold standard men, consigns to the category of "idiots," by declaring that they "are absolutely incapable of reasoning upon any subject whatever."

Colonel, candidly, do you not feel as though you had made a "damphool" of yourself?

You declared that "Bryan hates bond-holders." "Bryan hates capitalists." No human tongue ever uttered a falsehood more base, or a slander more inexcusable. Bryan hates no man; he hates no living creature. On the contrary, his great soul goes out in good will to all humanity, rich and poor. So far from hating the millionaire capitalists, he would save them from the sad fate which their own mad policy must inevitably bring upon them, if continued much longer. During the recent campaign the physical, mental and moral powers and qualities of William Jennings Bryan were tested to a degree, previously unknown in all history; and he has come out without a solitary blemish. His opponents have abused, slandered, vilified and ridiculed him without stint; and yet in the midst of all, he uttered not one solitary word of resentment or disrespect against a single individual. True, he does hate tyranny, oppression, injustice and all combinations against the general welfare; and his voice, vote and actions have harmonized with his professions, perfectly. Would that the same could be said of Colonel Ingersoll.

Allow me to ask you to explain at least one point in your theory on money. You declare that nothing is now money in this country but gold, and that gold is money by nature, and not by law; and then you add that all money must be at par. Now please answer:

First—Please tell us what law of nature decreed that exactly 25 8-10 grains of gold 9-10 fine should be a "dollar?"

Second—Would it be a "dollar" in the

shape of a marble, even though no one questioned its weight or fineness?

Third—When congress passed a law decreeing that no more gold dollars should be made and successfully executed the decree, did that body perform a miracle by killing a law of nature?

Fourth—When you say that gold is the only money and that "all money must be at par," I ask you, At par with what? "At par with itself," must be your answer, if there is any meaning at all to your assertions.

Think of the great Ingersoll standing on the rostrum as a teacher on economics, and declaring that "a gold eagle must be at par with itself;" "a bushel of wheat must always be at par with a bushel of wheat;" and "a pound of skunk cabbage must always be at par with a pound of skunk cabbage."

I challenge you to point to a single dollar or other denomination of United States money ever issued, whether stamped upon gold, silver or paper, made by the fiat of law, a full legal tender for all debts, public and private, that was ever below par. Do you not know that the \$60,000,000 of greenbacks that were issued early in the war, without the exception clause on the back—made a full legal tender including customs dues,—remained at par with gold all the time? Do you not have the great work of Judge Tiffany, on Constitutional Law, in your law library? Why in the name of common sense do you remain so ignorant on the money question?

Colonel Ingersoll is brilliant in speech. He utters beautifully rounded sentences, and he soars to great heights in oratory; but a fair analysis of the declarations, assumptions, and reasoning (or rather lack of reasoning) found in "the great political effort of his life," in defense of the single gold standard, reveals the fact that so far as logic is concerned, he has evolved little beyond an overgrown booby.

And now, Colonel, in conclusion, you may think it presumptuous in me, an humble wage-earner, to thus call you to account; but it is not only my right as an American citizen, to do so, it is a duty, if I believe you are defending a pernicious policy. Hence I have no apology to offer. Nevertheless, naught has been put down in malice. If the gold standard is maintained, and the \$600,000,000 of greenbacks and silver treasury notes are funded into idle, untaxed, interest-bearing bonds, as the eastern bankers and stock gamblers demand, it will be but a few years before there will have been enough "object lessons" to convince even you, that this open letter was timely and just.

And if, perchance, you should happen to be one of the victims of your own folly—bereft of home, a wanderer, a "tramp," hungry and footsore, as are thousands of native-born Americans today, as good as either of us, made so by reason of the class laws placed upon the statute books by your party—then you will, perhaps, knock at the humble door of some member of the "Bryan mob," and I guarantee you will be welcomed with extended hand and open heart, and receive the fullest measure of his hospitality.

And as the "Mistakes of Moses" already pale into insignificance compared with the mistakes of some modern public men, it will then be an opportune time for you to write a new book and call it "The Mistakes of Ingersoll."

Charles Bonsall.

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TITLE**